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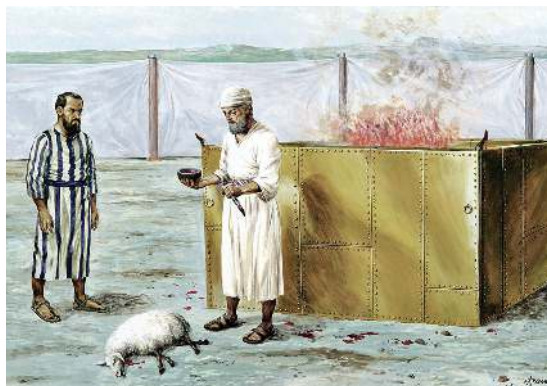
is a supplement of *Precious Seed International* designed for those young in faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live.

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Sacrificing to God Today

Unless one actually lived in Old Testament times it is unlikely that one could imagine how much the whole of an Israelite's life was centred around the offering of sacrifices. Every morning and evening, without fail, animals were sacrificed by the priests; every day a steady stream of men and women brought their own individual sin offerings, trespass offerings, burnt offerings, peace offerings and meal offerings; the great feasts of the year were celebrated by the whole nation at Passover, on the Day of Atonement and at the Feast of Tabernacles; each harvest was celebrated by the offering of the first-fruits; even the birth of a child involved an offering to God. Sacrifices, whether blood offerings or not, were part and parcel of an Israelite's life. You just could not get away from them.



With the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross all these offerings became

obsolete. They had merely pointed towards Christ's death and they were fulfilled in His death, Heb. 9. 11-14; 10. 11-13. The believer, today, does not need to bring blood sacrifices to God anymore. The Lord Jesus is the only sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins that we bring to God. But does that mean we no longer need to bring Him any sacrifice at all? Are there any sacrifices that we can bring Him, and if so, what are they?

A sacrifice of praise

Once my heart is right before God and I approach Him with sincerity, humility, due reverence and godly fear, I find I can bring certain other sacrifices to Him. Hebrews chapter 13 verse 15 speaks of offering 'the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that

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is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name'. This, too, is something Old Testament saints knew, 'The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness . . . and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord', Jer. 33. 11. Praise can be defined as joyfully telling others that we think God is worthy of honour and glory. Praise is the natural response from those who see God's might and power in creation; in fact, the whole of creation itself praises God. It is also the natural response when men see God's goodness and know what He has done for them. The theme of Psalm 107 is, 'O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men!', vv. 8, 15, 21, 31. We praise God when we 'declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the Lord; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee', Isa. 12. 4-6. When, therefore, I

praise the Lord for His greatness and His goodness I am bringing an acceptable offering to Him.

A sacrifice of thanksgiving

David also speaks in Psalm 107 verse 22 of offering to God 'the sacrifices of thanksgiving', and he says, 'I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call upon the name of the Lord in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the Lord's house', Ps. 116. 17-19; cf. Amos 4. 5. When we thank the Lord for what He has done for us, perhaps in general terms such as thanking Him for His salvation, His love, His care, His mercy for all His people, we are giving an offering to God. When we thank Him more specifically for answered prayer or for guidance and provision that is specific to us, we again offer something to God. In praising God we declare His worth; in thanking Him we acknowledge our debt to Him. A grateful heart, when it expresses itself to God, offers an acceptable sacrifice to Him.

A sacrifice of prayer

Perhaps it seems strange to us that prayer should be thought of as a sacrifice or an offering to God, but again it is David who writes, 'Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice', Ps. 141. 2. Now, prayer is a general term for most ways of speaking to God, but the meaning behind the word 'prayer' here is 'intercession' and 'supplication'. It is different, therefore, to offering praise and thanksgiving. In another world, the world of heaven to come,



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the apostle John saw a gathering around the throne of God and he saw the Lord Jesus surrounded by the four and twenty elders who had 'harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints', Rev. 5. 7-8. It seems as though the very act of approaching God, humbly bowing before His throne, acknowledging His greatness and our dependence upon Him, and asking Him to intervene in our lives and in the lives of others, is an act of worship which is acceptable and precious to God, and that the words we use to form our prayer requests are sacrifices to Him.

A sacrifice of things

It is possible, therefore, for me to worship God when I pray for others. It is also possible for me to worship God when I give to others. Paul received gifts from the believers in the assembly in Philippi. They evidently wanted to help him in his service for God, so they sent him practical gifts. He says, 'No church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity', Phil. 4. 15-16. This practical giving, whether of their money or of their possessions to help him, is seen by Paul as 'an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God', v. 18. Many missionaries and full-time workers have done what Paul had done – recognized that those who preach the gospel have a right to 'live of the gospel', 1 Cor. 9. 14. Yet they have chosen not to exercise that right and have gone out to serve God with no guaranteed income or salary. They would rather live by faith, looking to

God for support. Now it is good for us to pray for them, but in so far as you and I give to them, we give to the God who has called them and sent them, and we give to Him, through them. Most people write to such missionaries to encourage them that God will provide their needs. They quote, 'My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus', Phil. 4. 19. In fact, it is Paul who encourages those who have given to him, by saying that, because of their sacrifice, and perhaps in their resultant poverty, God will meet *their* need!

A sacrifice of good works

So, praying for others is seen by God as an offering to Him, and so is giving to His servants. But the Spirit of God also tells us that when we do good to anyone God sees it as an offering to Him. 'To do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased', Heb. 13. 16. Our God is a compassionate, benevolent, kind, generous and caring God and expects His people to be the same. When we see others in need, He expects us to share what we have with them. 'If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?' Jas. 2. 15-16. We are supposed to 'do good unto

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all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith', Gal. 6. 10. Again, this is something God had taught in Old Testament times when He reminded His people, 'I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings', Hos. 6.6. Practical Christianity is also worshipping Christianity.

A dying sacrifice

The apostle Paul, in his last days and his last imprisonment in Rome, writes to his colleague and son in the faith, Timothy, and says, 'I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand', 2 Tim. 4. 6. In what way is Paul's death an offering? The idea behind the word here is not an offering as in a blood sacrifice; it is that of the drink offering. The drink offering in the Old Testament was offered when wine was poured out over an animal before it was burnt up. So Paul sees his life and his approaching death as the pouring out of an offering which is being given to God. Many believers over the millennia of time have been poured out like this to God, and their martyrdoms have been offerings to Him. Who knows whether some of us in a day to come might also have to lay down our lives for our Lord, and be poured out like drink offerings to Him?

A living sacrifice

Though most of us would not want to die a martyr's death, at least it is something that is over and done with fairly quickly. Paul encourages us all as believers to do something very difficult and that is to 'present your body a living sacrifice', Rom. 12. 1. Is not a living sacrifice a contradiction in terms? Don't all sacrifices have to die? The answer is both 'No', and 'Yes'. As a believer, I am to present my body, my flesh and blood, to God. This means I am not to commit sin with my body, but keep it pure and clean for Him. I am to die daily to those sins-in-the-body which the world sees so acceptable – immoral living, fornication, adultery, the satisfying of human needs in a sinful way. In order to be such a living sacrifice I have to die daily and this is the hard part of it all. A living sacrifice may have to offer himself or herself to God for years and years and years, by refusing to be 'conformed to this world,' by being 'transformed by the renewing of your mind', v 2. Yet, says Paul, in the light of what the Lord has done in offering Himself to God on our behalf, such a huge ask is 'your reasonable service' and when we do it, it, is 'holy, acceptable to God', v 1.

A costly sacrifice

David also teaches us an important principle for worship: it is worth nothing if it costs us nothing. The prophet Gad told David God would avert His anger if David offered up burnt offerings to Him. So David went to buy a suitable place. The owner offered to give David the place free of charge, along with his own animals



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for David to use as an offering to God. 'Nay', said David, 'but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing', 2 Sam. 24. 24. The very first mention of worship shows us how costly it can be. Abraham went where God had told him to go to do what God had told them to do. He was to offer up as a burnt offering his own most dearly beloved son, Isaac. And he says, 'I and the lad will go yonder and worship', Gen. 22. 5. Worship that is acceptable to God is something that has to be worth something, or cost us something. The fragrance that filled the house in Bethany where Mary anointed the head and feet of our Lord with perfume was all the sweeter because of the sheer extravagance of her devotion to her Lord, John 12. 3-8.

A right attitude

However, none of the above spiritual sacrifices that I can bring to God is acceptable to Him if I am not right with Him. Even Old Testament saints came to realize that an offering or sacrifice was not in itself acceptable to God if the one bringing the offering came with the wrong attitude. So Samuel complained that Saul was wrong in offering a sacrifice with a disobedient heart. 'To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams', 1 Sam. 15. 22. God complained to His earthly people, the Jews, that He was 'full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks', Isa. 1. 11. 'Bring no more vain oblations', He said, v. 13. Why? Surely, they were doing what

God had told them to do? Our Lord explains why. 'Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me', Mark 7. 6. God hates hypocrisy. David was right when he said, 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise', Ps. 51. 17. In any age and dispensation, the first and foremost sacrifice any one of us can bring to God, a sacrifice that validates or invalidates all others that we bring Him, is that broken, humble, contrite heart which pleases Him, Isa. 66. 2.

Conclusion

The teaching of scripture, therefore, is clear. As I walk around in this world I can offer up things to God that please Him. As I sit on a bus, ride on a train, type at a computer, wash the dishes, look after the children, care for elderly parents, I can be a priest *lifting up heart and voice* to God in praise and thanksgiving or in prayer. In *giving to God's servants*, or in *showing practical kindness* to those who are around me, I worship Him. In *living a godly life* in an ungodly world I present myself to Him as a sacrifice that pleases Him. Should I be called to be a martyr, *laying down my life for Him* would be an act of worship, too. But none of this will please Him if I do not present to Him at all times that *broken and contrite heart* from which should flow a life of sincere, costly worship. Are there no sacrifices to bring to Him in this church age? There are many. I should try to bring Him some today.

'Going down ...'

James Dean once starred in a film entitled *Rebel without a Cause* and became an icon of rebellious youth. That title could well have described the prophet Jonah, who was told by God to go and preach against the city of Nineveh, but refused to do so. As a prophet of God, to whom God spoke and who received the word of God for his time, Jonah was **'on line'**. It is good to be in touch with God and to hear what He has to say to us in this world in which we live and in the situation in which we find ourselves. This world is crying out for Christians who are 'on line with God'. Yet the moment Jonah chose to disobey God's clear instructions he stepped **'out of line'**. He boarded a ship that was heading for Tarshish, which was in the very opposite direction to Nineveh. Nothing would make him go and preach to a people he hated and feared. It was not that he did not want to preach judgement to them – it must surely have been music to his ears to hear that God wanted to

judge and destroy his enemies the Assyrians. It wasn't the greatness of God that was Jonah's problem: it was the goodness of God. Jonah's great fear was that, if as a result of going to Nineveh and preaching judgement upon the city the people repented, God would forgive them. 'I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful,

slow to anger and of great kindness', Jon. 4. 2. Disobedience to the clearly revealed will of God is always a bad thing. No true believer should ever set out on a path of deliberate disobedience to God. We may sometimes go against His will unknowingly but to do so knowingly and deliberately is a very serious thing.

But God had not finished with Jonah. He targeted him – Jonah was **'in the firing line'**. First of all God targeted the ship in which Jonah was asleep, sending a massive storm upon it, so that it was in danger of sinking. Like a great javelin thrower, God hurled a storm onto the ship. Then he targeted the prophet asleep in the hold of the ship, for He made sure that 'the lot fell upon Jonah', Jon. 1. 7; Prov. 16. 33. Jonah now knew that there was no getting away from God. God was pursuing him.

Jonah's direction

The Spirit of God through the writer of the book deliberately uses the same word to show us what disobedience to God leads to. Having decided to rebel against God's revealed will for him, Jonah went **'down'** to Joppa, he went **'down into'** the ship 'to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord,' and he then went **'down'** into the sides of the ship' to go to sleep, Jon 1. 3, 5. When he is eventually thrown out of the ship, he 'went **down** to the bottoms of the mountains' before the fish swallowed him up, 2. 6. The implication of this is clear – a course of disobedience to God will always lead us 'down' –down



spiritually, down morally, down emotionally and perhaps even down physically. The direction of a disobedient servant of God is downwards.

Jonah's decision

We notice also, however, Jonah's decisions. Having been found out, he does two very important things that contribute to God's forgiveness and Jonah's eventual restoration. He begins by confessing his disobedience *to the people* around him. 'The men [in the ship] knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord because he had told them', 1. 10. If we do wrong to others, if we are disobedient to God, if we sin against Him, we ought to confess that before men. It may be that we are repentant before God, but it is good to show others that, too. Then Jonah does the next important thing – he confesses his sin *to God*, chapter 2.

Jonah's discoveries

Jonah has already made one important discovery - that **God disciplines** His people. King David had learned that as well. 'Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word', Ps. 119. 67. God does discipline His children, just as human fathers do, and we should be grateful for that. The way of a transgressor – even a believing transgressor – is hard. 'Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth', Heb. 12. 5-6. God can, and will, bring trials upon us to bring us back into line. But then Jonah discovers for himself what all repentant sinners find – that **God**



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hears and answers prayer. 'Out of the belly of hell cried I and thou heardest my voice', 2. 2. 'When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord. And my prayer came in unto thee', 2. 7. Thankfully for Jonah, he also discovered that **God delivers** His repentant people. 'The Lord spake unto the fish and it vomited out Jonah', 2. 10. God was giving His prophet another opportunity to obey Him and do what He had asked him to do. 'The word of the Lord came unto Jonah a second time', 3. 1.

Are you a disobedient Christian today? Have you set out on a way of life that you know is contrary to the revealed will of God for you as a believer? Learn from Jonah – if you continue on this course, you will go 'down'. Spiritually speaking, you will lose close fellowship with God and possibly close fellowship with His people; morally speaking, your conscience will become increasingly scarred and silenced; and physically speaking, God may cause you to be sickly and maybe even to be called home, 1. Cors. 11. 30-31. Note your direction, make the decision to confess and turn again to God and then you will make a wonderful discovery – God always hears the prayers of the repentant.

Fools in Fellowship

Recognizing, but not being, fools.

The Party-goers



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Meet **Master Smashed**. He is the sort of chap, along with his twin sister Miss Tippy, who knows that the best solution to the problem of drinking too much alcohol is to be a teetotaler – to leave it alone completely – but has all sorts of reasons for thinking that drinking alcohol is good. His usual argument is that he does not see anywhere in the Scriptures that forbids the drinking of alcohol and he is probably right – the Bible warns us against excessive drinking but not drinking itself. This is because the consumption of wine and ‘strong drink’ was a fact of life for Old and New Testament cultures where good, fresh drinking water was not available. His second argument, which is less reliable, is that it is good to drink with non-Christian friends and to be like them in order to win them for the Lord. This means that Mr Smashed and Miss Tippy see no reason why they should not go pubbing and clubbing. The trouble is that, in that sort of an environment it is actually very difficult to witness for the Lord. Instead, a ‘good time’ is had by all, but not much witnessing is done and poor Mr Smashed finds himself the worse for wear more often than he should.

‘Wine is a mocker, strong drink (beer) is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise’ says the wise man in Proverbs 20. 1. ‘Be not among winebibbers’ is the advice given in Proverbs 23. 20-21. Mr Smashed should note that the advice given here is **not** to keep company with those that frequently drink too much. It is best to keep away from that environment, but not from those people. Why? Because alcohol is not a stimulant, it is a depressant. It will not sharpen your wits, it will dull them. ‘It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not

for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more,’ Proverbs 31. 4-7. Miss Tippy ought also to remember that drunkenness often brings moral misery and compromise (Gen. 9. 20-21; Gen 19. 32-33).

‘Who hath woe? who hath sorrow?’ (emotional problems) ‘who hath contentions? who hath babbling?’ (problems with relationships) ‘who hath wounds without cause?’ ‘who hath redness of eyes?’ (physical effects). ‘They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it gives his colour in the cup, when it moves itself aright. At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder’ (hangovers and regrets). ‘Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things’ (psychological problems and lack of discipline). ‘Yea, thou shalt be as he that lies down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lies upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not.’ (confusion and loss of self-control) ‘when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again’ (addiction), Proverbs 23. 29-35. The clear teaching of Scripture is ‘be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess,’ Eph. 5. 18. Only fools mess around with alcohol.

